The healing of the lame man at Bethesda

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John 5:1 – 15

After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.
In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.
For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.
And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.
When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?
The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.
Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.
And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.
The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.
He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.
Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?
And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.
Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.
The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.2.
The main subject of John

The story in John 5 is very well known and speaks powerfully to the imagination. We can form a fairly clear picture of this remarkable hospital with its most varied assortment of sick people. They were in fact invalids. They lay around the water that was stirred at certain times because — as it says here — an angel came. They were waiting for healing. It is a remarkable story, not least because of the many details that are given. In the Gospel of John, miracles of the Lord Jesus are recorded for a special reason. Most of

these miracles do not appear in the other Gospels. They have been deliberately selected by the Holy Spirit who led John in describing these miracles. They were chosen with a definite purpose.

> John 20:30, 31
> And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
> But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

These stories serve as proof. The apostle John stays with his subject throughout this Gospel. The opening of the whole book is already striking.

> John 1:1, 2
> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
> The same was in the beginning with God.

It is not only the opening of the book, but it is also the title of the book. We are accustomed to another title, namely: The Holy Gospel according to the description of John. Such a title may be useful, but they are not inspired words. The actual title is: “In the beginning was the Word.” In this way the whole character of the book is immediately determined. When we are occupied with Scripture, it turns out that Scripture is structured differently from ordinary books. Normally one begins with a long introduction. Then one cautiously comes to the point that really matters. That is never the case in the Bible. The Bible always goes straight to the point. So it is in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word.” It is both the introduction and the content of the whole book. John never departs from this subject again. All the chapters and details are about the Word and the power of that Word. Not only in a very abstract sense, but also about the Word that is God and the Word that became flesh.

> John 1:14
> And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The Word

In the first chapters the Word is constantly compared with water. John 1 speaks about the Word that is Light, that makes manifest, that appears in the world and became flesh. John 1 continues with the ministry of John the Baptist, who immersed his converts in water. It seems as if the apostle changes the subject, but that is not so. The water of baptism is namely an illustration of what the Word of God actually is. Water and Word are identical concepts in Scripture. All things came into being through the Word; we too. Yet all things also came into being through water. Although it may seem so, this is not contradictory. When we speak of the new creation, we are born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

> 1 Peter 1:3
> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We are born again of incorruptible seed.

1 Peter 1:23

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

We are born again by the washing of regeneration.

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

The Word of God is represented by water; also the water of baptism in John 1. In John 2 stands the famous story of water that is changed into wine. This is a picture of the coming into being of a new creation; out of the water. Water was turned into wine. In other words: the Word is turned into a new creation. The cleansing of the temple did not happen by water, but by the Word, namely by the Lord Jesus Himself, the Word become flesh. Therefore He — just like the Word of God — is water and therefore He cleansed the temple. Here too, then, we find no change of subject. It is still about the same thing, namely the function of the Word. The Word cleanses. In John 3 we read of the conversation of the Lord Jesus with Nicodemus, the scribe. Nicodemus understood very little of it. The Lord Jesus pointed out to him that He had learned everything He told him from the Word. All the things the Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus about regeneration in general came from the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus quoted from them. Things are found in the Word. One must be born again of water and Spirit. “Water and Spirit” is a certain figure of speech (hendiadys), whereby one thing is expressed by two different nouns. “Water and Spirit” actually means “spiritual water.” One must be born of spiritual water. The subject is therefore still the same.

Thus we come to John 4, where the Lord Jesus met the Samaritan woman. It was a meeting that took place at Jacob’s well. The well that Jacob himself had dug. The conversation here too was about water, namely about the difference between the water from Jacob’s well and the water that Jesus Christ gives.

John 4:14

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Here again there is mention of eternal life, as the result of the water. The subject is still the same as in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word brings forth life: the life of the old creation, but also — and that is far more important — the life of the new creation; on the ground of regeneration. In all these chapters attention is drawn to the function of the Word, the only Source of Life there is: the Word. The necessity of the Word is spoken of: there is only life in the Word. If life is to be nourished and built up, then it is through the Word; nothing else. Christian life can only be manifested if that Christian life is built and nourished by the Word of God. If someone thinks that Christians ought to live in a Christian way, then one only needs to do one thing: hold the Word of God before them. The rest then takes care of itself, for that is what the Word does (provided one submits to that Word). Simple, then! This does indicate the necessity of studying the Scriptures. One must deal with (and learn to handle) the Scriptures! In the last part of John 4 the son of the nobleman is spoken of. He was healed by the Word. The Lord Jesus was called. He wanted to go with him, but that was not necessary, for He only needed to speak.

Matthew 8:8

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

The Word alone must do it. The Lord said: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” The man believed the word that the Lord Jesus spoke unto him and went his way (John 4:50). By the power of the Word the son was healed; even at a distance. In John 5 the story is about a pool at Bethesda that was supposed to have a healing effect. One may wonder whether that was really so.

If everything were normal, that water ought to have a healing effect. If we go back to the beginning of things, then man came forth from water and consists of about ninety per cent water. This means that for man nothing ought to be as good as water. There is also nothing that is so indispensable for the natural man as (pure) water. People were healed by it.It was not merely a thought of the people. More miracles happened in those days and it stands to reason that this water, at this place, would have a special effect. For it is a special place and is emphatically described.

John 5:1

After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

A time indication is given. It concerns a date connected with a feast of the Jews that was apparently celebrated in Jerusalem. It does not say which feast it was. There are three possibilities: the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, or the feast of tabernacles. These three feasts had to be celebrated in Jerusalem according to the law.

Deuteronomy 16:16

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:

It was probably not the feast of unleavened bread, for that is usually mentioned explicitly. If it had been the feast of tabernacles, that would also have been stated. Some say it was the feast of Purim (from the book of Esther) and that is why it is not mentioned. The feast of Purim, however, did not have to be celebrated in Jerusalem. Moreover, it does not form part of the law. It was probably the feast of weeks, the beginning of the actual harvest. The day after the feast was the first day of the harvest. Then the harvest began in Israel. In the Bible the harvest has to do with the breaking in of the Messianic kingdom. There are special laws concerning the harvest, such as laws about the sheaf of firstfruits, the firstfruits loaves, the harvest itself, the gleaning, and the corners of the field that were not to be reaped. It is a complicated matter, because the harvest in all its details is a picture of the future establishment of the Messianic kingdom. The setting up of that kingdom takes place in stages. That is why the harvest also had to take place in stages. There is no natural reason for it. Everything that happens in the old creation is a type of the new creation. It was the beginning of the harvest, and that is the moment when a beginning should be made with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. When the Messianic kingdom is set up and revealed in the world, the Lord Jesus goes to Jerusalem in fulfilment of many prophecies and psalms.

The conversion of Israel

The healing of the lame man here at Bethesda is a model for the future conversion of Israel. The hardness, the unwillingness, the inability of Israel will be removed. It

concerns a paralysed man. In the Bible being lame or crippled is a softening expression (euphemism) for impotence, unfruitfulness. That is also the case in the story of Jacob at the Jabbok (Genesis 32). A man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Jacob was touched in the hollow of his thigh and from that moment walked with a limp. The meaning of that is that he became impotent. His old man could no longer bring forth fruit. Jacob became unfruitful at the moment he was converted and said to the Lord: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." That is the end of the old creation. With unfruitfulness the old creation ceases by definition. It is only a matter of time.
In John 5 the story is about a man who could not walk. The figurative meaning is not that he could not move through space, but above all that he could no longer move through time. His generation would be the last. It actually means the end of an old creation. The moment when this miracle took place was the beginning of the harvest. It was the time when the kingdom should begin; the moment when the fruit of the land (= Israel) should be gathered in. It was the time when the harvest should be gathered into the barn (compare Matthew 13).

> John 5:2
> Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

For the story the details could have been left out. For example, the mention of the place where it happened. The place is Jerusalem; by the sheep gate. The name "the sheep gate" finds its origin in the fact that the gate was used for the sheep. The sacrificial animals came from outside the city and were brought in through the sheep gate. It was therefore in fact "the door of the sheep."

> John 10:7
> Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

"Sheep" in the Bible are a picture of believers. In any case they are a picture of the people of God in general and very specially a picture of Israel (Psalm 100:3; 95:7). Israel is the flock and the King of Israel is the good Shepherd. The sheep gate therefore has to do with the entering in of the sheep. Then we arrive at the same conclusion as in verse 1. It is about the breaking in of the Messianic kingdom, the entering into the kingdom. That is expressed by the harvest and also by the sheep gate. In Nehemiah 3 the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem is described. The wall is the most important part of the city. If it falls away there is no city any more. It is about who built it and where. It is striking that the gates are mentioned. The story begins and ends at the sheep gate.

> Nehemiah 3:1, 32
> Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.
> And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.
> Nehemiah 12:39
> And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate.

The most important gate in Nehemiah, just as here in John 5, is the sheep gate. It is the gate through which the sacrificial animals went in to be offered. It is also the entrance

through which Israel will enter the kingdom. Note well: the sheep that went in were to be slaughtered. They went in, but they would die. Once again the same story is told! Jacob, the ancestor of Israel who had dug the well in John 4, came to conversion. From then on he expected the blessing from the LORD alone and no longer from his own devices. At that moment he became unfruitful. So it is here also. The sheep went in, but lost their lives. This line of thought is also expressed in:

> John 3:3
> Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Living Water cleanses

Corruption does not inherit incorruption. One must first be born again.

> 1 Corinthians 15:50
> Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

Entering the kingdom costs the (old) life. So it was with the sheep and with Jacob. The pool by the sheep gate speaks of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, the entering into the kingdom of the Messiah. The pool is a type of the Word.

> Ephesians 5:26
> That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

What one does with the water (baptising, washing, drinking) is not important. The meaning remains fundamentally the same. Water is a picture of the Word and therefore also of Christ who is the Word. Water is likewise a type of the Holy Spirit (rivers of living water shall flow from your innermost being: John 7:38, 39). In John 5 it is a picture of the Word of God that cleanses someone. It was a pool in which one could wash oneself and that was supposed to cleanse people. The pool is a type of the Word. That pool already came up in John 2. The water that became wine first had to be poured explicitly into vessels. Those vessels stood there “after the manner of the purifying of the Jews.” It was water (because of those vessels) with which one could cleanse oneself. The pool is a type of the Word and it cleanses particularly well. It cleanses the whole man. Scripture teaches that man is contaminated or defiled with sin. How does he get rid of that sin? By laying aside the whole old man. There is nothing to be cleansed. The entire old man is defiled. One cannot pull it out. One gets rid of one’s sin — and all the consequences of it — by laying aside the entire old nature.

The Word of God cleanses so thoroughly that it not only takes away sin, but also the entire old nature. You need not be alarmed at that. Some say: “If it has to be like that, then it is not for me!” That is short-sighted. If one looks a little further, one knows that one must eventually lay aside that old man anyway. Whether it happens now or later is only a matter of time. Humanly speaking one may prefer “later.” However, if it is the only way to be saved, to be delivered from sin and all its consequences, then better “now.” It is only a difference in time. The old creation will be destroyed anyway. The Word of God cleanses so thoroughly that it takes away our whole body. The Word of God always goes against human nature. First, because that old nature is sinful and second, because the Word of God is poison to the old man.

The house of mercy

The pool was called Bethesda. That surname Bethesda is also known with other vowels: Bethsaida. “Beth” means “house.” “Saida” means “mercy.” It is a house of mercy. A house in which mercy is obtained. Bethesda is a name that belongs to Israel. Israel itself is a house in which mercy is obtained. As believers we have in a spiritual way received a share in the citizenship of Israel.

> Ephesians 2:12, 16, 19
> That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:
> And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:
> Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

Believers of the present (fifth) dispensation have in a spiritual sense become of the same people. They have received a share in the house of mercy, Bethesda. In this house mercy is obtained. There are blessings to be received that all come from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is also evident, for it says that it had five porches. It is not said in which porch the man lay. He will undoubtedly have lain in the fifth porch. This has to do with the meaning of the number “five,” the number of grace. The number “five” stands for that which God does; from outside. It refers to the way in which God intervenes in this visible world. The number “four” points to the visible, old world. The number “five” corresponds with the invisible things and therefore points to grace. We must expect grace from the invisible — the Lord. The number “five” refers to the redemptive work of the Lord Himself, which came into force at the beginning of the present, fifth dispensation; through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why this house of mercy has five porches. All kinds of applications can be given. Some say that the five porches refer to the five books of Moses. That is also true, for in those five books of Moses, although called “the law,” grace is indeed made known. The law bears witness to the righteousness of God (Romans 3:21, 22). The law — the Torah — is built up of five books. The law teaches how one is justified before God and teaches what someone must do after he has sinned. Being a leper and the healing is described in the law. All kinds of instructions are given concerning the priests, the bringing of offerings, etc. In the law grace is preached. The law says that a sinner is justified before God. Once a year the High Priest went into the innermost sanctuary to make atonement for the people; on the great day of atonement (Leviticus 16). That is grace. For some reason, however, that grace is not learned from the law.

> John 5:3, 4
> In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.
> For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

These diseases (verse 3) are also mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels: blind people who are healed; lame people who walk again; lepers who are made whole and a man with a withered hand who was healed. A withered hand has to do with “five” (five fingers). There was something wrong with the hand that is the picture of the grace of

God. That hand was withered. The hand was not stretched out, as in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:20, 21; Isaiah 10:4; 31:3).

> Isaiah 5:25
> Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcases were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.
> Proverbs 1:24
> Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

The withered hand is a picture of "blind" Israel. Israel was not able to grasp the hand of the Lord and therefore not able to lay hold of grace. The hand was diseased. That is why, historically speaking, one cannot reproach Israel with anything. They were not capable of anything else.

> Jeremiah 5:21
> Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.

That is why the Lord Jesus came to heal the blind; not only those who were physically blind, but especially and above all those who were spiritually blind. The same applies to the lame who were healed. Of Israel it is taught that she was lame, unfruitful, and did not walk according to the requirement of God. That is why the Lord Jesus came to heal the lame. So it was also with the withered hand. There was no strength left in it. The hand was deformed and incapable of normal actions. Precisely those things were healed by the Lord, and they are mentioned because they have such great typical significance. The miracles that the Lord Jesus performed are not called "miracles" in the Gospel of John, but "signs."

> John 4:54
> This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

The first sign is mentioned in:

> John 2:11
> This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

The Lord Jesus performed miracles, that is, signs. By our standards they were miracles. They are miracles that have a meaning. They point to other things. In this story (and in many others) we are told about a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered (John 5:3). The Lord Jesus came as the Physician.

> Exodus 15:26
> And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

Jesus came in and selected one of the sick. Afterwards a miracle had taken place. One man had been healed, but a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, and withered remained behind. They were still waiting for the troubling of the water, but they were not healed. That is the remarkable thing. It was not primarily about that sick man as such, but about spiritual realities. The Lord asked a — to us — absurd question: "Wilt thou be

made whole?" If the man did not want it, it did not happen. The real question is: "Do you actually want to?" That is not so strange, for the situation of this multitude at Bethesda, in this house of mercy, is the situation of Israel. Israel had the five books of Moses, the law. To Israel were committed the oracles of God.

> Romans 3:1, 2
> What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?
> Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Israel lived in a special relationship with the Lord and in a house of mercy, but she was sick, blind, lame, and withered. Generally speaking she was also dead. Yet Israel did not want to be healed. That is nothing special. That is the situation of every natural man. He is sick and he knows it. Yet he does not want to be healed. The way of healing is the way of laying aside the old man and putting on the new man.

> Ephesians 4:21-24
> If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:
> That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;
> And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;
> And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

However sick the old man may be, one usually does not want to be rid of him. When someone is ill, he will usually resist to the utmost. He keeps fighting against a disease of which he knows he will die. That is nature. One thing is certain: the old man must go; one way or another. He passes away. The question therefore is: "Wilt thou be made whole?" The answer is: "Yes." The only reason the others were not healed was that they did not come to the Lord Jesus and ask for healing. Nothing more is said about the multitude. The initiative came from the Lord Jesus. He found this man. He asked the question. We find this also in:

> Luke 19:10
> For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.
> John 12:47
> And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

The Lord is the One who has reconciled the world — mankind — to God.

> 2 Corinthians 5:19
> To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
> Romans 5:10, 11
> For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
> And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

He is the One who came in. The initiative for the healing came from Him. Why was that necessary? After all, the lame man only needed to wait for the moving of the water? He only needed someone to throw him into the water at the right time. With this we have

arrived exactly at the situation of Israel. There was water and that water did have a healing effect. A healing effect was indeed attributed to this pool. The healing effect, however, was only present at a certain moment. Normally that healing effect was not there. Only when the water was troubled by an angel did it have a healing effect. In this way that water is a type of the Word of God and especially of the law. It was standing water in which there was no movement. It was the Word of God that was written with a finger on tables of stone (rock-hard, fixed, rigid, strict). The righteous law, in which there was no movement, was made powerless through the flesh.

> Romans 7:12, 14
> Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.
> For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

The law was not wrong, but the flesh. The law was powerless because it applied to the flesh.

> Romans 8:3
> For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.

It was the inability of the old man and not of the law. The Word of God is here represented as standing water. One can wash one's body with this pool water, but by that one is not delivered from the diseases that are inside the body. Only when the water was troubled (= when the water became living) did it have a healing effect. Water is a picture of the Word of God. With this we are back in John 4. It is not about the standing water from Jacob's well, but about the living water that keeps moving. It is not about the written Word of God as such (= the law), but about the living Word of God that came into the world. The water at Bethesda was a type of the Word of God written up to that time; a type of the Old Testament. The water that was troubled is a type of the Word become flesh that came into the world and dwelt among us. We have beheld His glory.

> John 1:14
> And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The troubling of the water is a type of the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus, the Living Word. Christ alone can bring healing. It makes no difference whether one was thrown into that moving water or whether one had a meeting with the Lord.

> John 5:5-7
> And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.
> When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

The necessity of a Mediator

The people who lay by the water needed help to get into that water. By nature they were not able to do so. They needed a Mediator: the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). He is not only the living Water, but He is moreover the One who gives help. He came to this sick man and asked: "Wilt thou be made whole?" He helps! The sick man answered: "I have no man to put me into the pool…" This is exactly the representation of the position of Israel. It is an acknowledgement that one cannot do it oneself and needs help. That is

what the man said! He did not simply say: “Yes.” He said that he had no one to throw him in. He acknowledged that he needed help. This is a picture of Israel under the law. The law is powerless. One needs help! It is the same situation as in the story of the man who fell into the hands of robbers on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho. He lay there half dead by the roadside. The Lord told this parable in answer to a question from a lawyer: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). When one lies almost dead by the roadside, one can do nothing! One needs help, for man is dead in sins and trespasses. So it was also with the sick man by the pool. He could not move. Precisely because of that infirmity he could not be healed. He could not reach the water. There was healing nearby, but the flesh could not get to that healing. A Mediator was needed. That is what Paul explains in Hebrews. He argues there that Israel needed a mediator: Moses, Joshua, Aaron. He then argues that all these types are fulfilled in the Mediator, Christ, the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 7:17). He is the Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:24); not of the old covenant of the law. He is emphatically called Mediator.

> Hebrews 8:6
> But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

He mediates between God and man. He mediates and heals man. This man acknowledged that he needed help, but did not have it. “When the water is troubled,” he said, “another steppeth down before me.” From this people draw the conclusion that there was healing only for one person. One should not draw such conclusions, for they lead us away from the real intention of the words. This man is a type of the whole people of Israel throughout the centuries. At the moment the water becomes living (= at the moment the risen Christ appears in this world), there is healing for everyone who throws himself into Christ. Someone else proves to be ahead of the paralysed man. This is a picture of another people that is ahead of Israel. When the risen Lord appeared as the living Water, as the King of the Messianic kingdom, another people was ahead of Israel. Israel could not come to the Lord. There was too much in between (the law). That was the handicap. Israel had to give that up in order to be able to be joined to the risen Lord Jesus Christ. That is also what the apostle Paul sets out at length in Romans 7, 10 and 11 and in Hebrews. When one comes to the risen Christ and is healed by Him, one loses one’s natural descent at that moment. One is healed, but one has lost one’s old life. At that moment one is no longer a Jew, for descent no longer counts for anything with God. When the man came to the water after an angel had come, another proved to be ahead of him. That is exactly what the Lord Jesus said elsewhere when He said that many first shall be last and many last shall be first (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31). What was intended for Israel, Israel did not receive. This man had already lain sick for 38 years. All that time he had waited. After 38 years this man had a meeting with the living Water, with Christ.

38 years

The number “38” occurs only once more in the Bible, in the history of Israel in the wilderness.

> Exodus 16:35
> And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land

inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.38 years

Israel was 40 years on the way from Egypt to Canaan. That can only be if one makes a terrible detour and moreover is in no hurry, for otherwise one would be there in a few days; even if one walks. Israel arrived at the promised land after two years. Even that took a very long time. They apparently were in no hurry. After two years they came to Canaan.

Numbers 1:1

And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt,

...They were to explore the promised land and then take possession of it.

Numbers 13:1-3

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel.

They could in fact simply have continued on their way, for the LORD had promised them the land. They sent twelve spies to investigate. When they returned, those twelve were divided into two and ten! Only two of the twelve said that it was a good land. Those two, Joshua and Caleb, told them that there were giants living there from whom opposition was to be expected, but that did not matter, for the Lord had promised the land to Israel.

Numbers 14:6-9

And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

Ten spies did not believe that they were able to conquer that land. Israel as a people believed those ten spies.

Numbers 14:1-4

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

In practice this meant that the people did not believe that the LORD was able to give them that land. They did not believe at all that the LORD had already promised it to them. The result was that Israel turned back. In unbelief she wandered another 38 years through the wilderness and perished in the wilderness. Those who were unbelieving after two years did not enter the promised land. The new generation presented itself at the borders of the land and conquered it. The 38 years of Israel in the wilderness were years of wandering; in unbelief. Only those who believed that the LORD would give them that land received it. There were only two of them!

> Numbers 14:26-35
> And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
> How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.
> Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:
> Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,
> Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.
> But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.
> But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness.
> And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.
> After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.
> I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

This history is a picture of the history that Israel would undergo much later. At the appointed time, namely after two days (= on the third day, the day of the resurrection of Christ), Israel rejected Him at the appearing of Christ who would establish His kingdom over Israel. After that a period began that is pictured in this history of 38 years. The 38 years are mentioned in:

> Deuteronomy 2:14
> And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.

Caleb said that he had not grown old in that time. He was still as strong as in the time when he spied out the land.

> Joshua 14:6-11
> Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea.
> Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-

barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart.
Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD my God.
And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God.
And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.
As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in.

Joshua and Caleb had not grown older at all during those 45 years. Their history, their ageing process, only continued again after they had definitively taken possession of the land. Caleb was 40 years old when he spied out the land. 45 years later he was actually still as he had been when he was 40. After two years of wandering in the wilderness, when they had arrived at Kadesh-barnea, Israel rejected the salvation and the entering into Canaan.

John 1:10-12
He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;

In the time of Moses there were only two men who believed. On that ground they entered the promised land. The 38 years of Israel in the wilderness were years of unbelief. They ended in death. The next generation entered Canaan after 38 years. Those 38 years are brought to remembrance in John 5 by this man who had been sick for 38 years. It is not said why this man was sick. That is also not important. The 38 years of sickness of this man ended in his healing. An end was made to his old history. He became a new man. He stood up and walked. The 38 years of sickness stand for unbelief. That period ends in two ways: by being saved and by dying. That is exactly the same. The unbelieving men of Israel died during the 38 years in the wilderness. The new generation entered the land. After 38 years salvation took place. That salvation is in fact the taking away of the old man and the putting on of the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24).

John 5:8, 9
Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.
And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

As has already been pictured in John 2 and 3, it is about regeneration. That happens after 38 years. Here it is in the first place about the position of Israel. To this man — and figuratively to Israel — it was said: "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." There was not even any mention of healing. That is a matter of course. The Lord simply gave a command: "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." When God says, "Let there be light," then there is light. When the Lord says, "Rise," then one does so! The Lord once spoke almost the same words to the dead Lazarus (John 11:43, 44). The Word of God came to him and brought

life. Lazarus rose (from the dead). This man was healed by the Word of the Lord Jesus, of which the troubling of the water is a picture. The Word heals, just as with the son of the nobleman in John 4. The man had to take his bed with him. We would say: Just leave that bed behind. It is 38 years old and will therefore be worn out. Moreover the man did not know how far he would get. If he had to return to the water it would be easy if his bed were still there. He had to go and walk and take his bed with him, for he no longer needed it. He was sent on his way, so that for the time being there was no resting. This is exactly the situation that will apply to Israel when she has come to faith. The man also did it: "And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked." When Israel rises, takes up her bed and walks, it will be sabbath. If it were not sabbath, it would become sabbath at that moment! For the sabbath is after all a picture of the Messianic kingdom! This applies especially to Israel, because the sabbath is in the first place a Jewish feast day. Although it will be sabbath, Israel begins to work. The man was first of all reproached because he was healed. Instead of praising the Lord for the fact that this man was able to carry his bed, he was criticised because he carried his bed on the sabbath. Keeping the sabbath was considered more important than the healing of someone who had been sick for 38 years. Absurd! This proves how powerless the law was and how powerless Judaism was. People were no longer able to assess things at their true value.

John 5:10

The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

According to Jewish tradition it was forbidden. The man was called to account. In the law it says: "Ye shall do no servile work."

Leviticus 23:7, 8

In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

Exodus 20:10

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

The position of Israel under the law has to do with "slavery." It is a position of serfs. The position of Israel in slavery in Egypt is a model (a type) of the dispensation of the law that began later. When it is said of the sabbath "ye shall do no servile work," that must be interpreted as "the slavery is abolished." This does not mean that one may no longer work. It means that one is no longer in the service of another. One is free to do and leave undone what one wishes. This man was not carrying his bed because he had been given an order to do so. Nor was he doing it in slave service. He did it because he was free. So free that he could even go and stand wherever he wished. He took his bed, his resting place, with him. What is more natural to take with one on the sabbath than one's resting place? The only thing anyone needs on the sabbath is his bed. For the sabbath is after all a sabbath of rest!

John 5:11, 12

He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?

It was sabbath. The people asked him why he was walking with his bed. He said that it had been said to him: "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." The Lord had not said: "I heal thee." The Lord simply skipped that stage. If the man wanted to be made whole, he had to rise, take up his bed, and walk. He had no other choice. No word is spent on his healing. They asked: "What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?" They asked for a man. It is about the Man: the Son of man, the Son of God, who became man and took flesh and blood.

Philippians 2:7, 8

But [Christ Jesus] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Hebrews 2:14

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

Jesus Christ is the Son of man, the Heir of Adam, who would establish the kingdom of Adam. It was about that Man and about His kingdom.

John 5:13

And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.

Calling on the name of the LORD

The man did not know who the Man was who had spoken to him. He was healed and did not know by whom. This is typical of Israel, as also appears from the prophecies. When Israel is healed in the future, she will not know by whom. She is healed because she will call on the name of the LORD, the name Jehovah.

Joel 2:32

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

Romans 10:13

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

When the question is asked, "Who is the Man that said that?", Israel does not know. Was it a man? This man did not say "the man," but: "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk" (verse 11). He did not even know whether it was a man. The counter-question is then: "What man is that which said unto thee…" They suddenly knew it was a man. Afterwards, in the future, it will appear that Israel has been healed by Jehovah, the LORD. Jehovah will prove to be none other than the Lord Jesus, who is the Man, namely the Son of man. It is the Man Christ Jesus who will be the Physician of Israel. That is the meeting that will take place after her healing. That is what is pictured here. He that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away. That is the situation that will exist on the Mount of Olives. When the Lord has appeared on the Mount of Olives, He disappears again. No one knows at that moment who He actually was. If it is a man, they at any rate do not know which man. Afterwards

comes the meeting, after the believing remnant has fled out of the land. Such a situation also occurred with this man.

> John 5:14, 15
> Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.
> The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.

It was again the Lord who found him for the second time; after he had been healed and was in the temple, in the holy place. From this people conclude that the man was sick because he had sinned. That is not stated. It only says that he should sin no more. The story in John 5 has been discussed in connection with Israel. In this connection the first chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews have been quoted. In those chapters in which the 38 years of Israel in the wilderness are spoken of, it is said that Israel could not enter because of her sin, or because of her disobedience, or because of her unbelief. From this we can draw only one conclusion: sin is therefore unbelief! There was only one sin on account of which Israel did not enter. That was the sin of unbelief. “Unbelief” is the only sin on account of which man perishes.

> Hebrews 3:17-19
> But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness?
> And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?
> So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

When it was said to this man who had been made whole, “Sin no more,” it referred to his faith. Just as the Lord Jesus so often said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (compare Matthew 9:22; Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42), or: “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9). Here, in other words, exactly the same is said: “Sin no more.” One can say to someone, “Sin no more,” for everyone can believe. If this man had believed earlier, he would have been healed earlier. In connection with the typology that is at any rate so. It can be said to Israel today, but just as well to every other Gentile! By faith one enters the kingdom.

Faith alone

When one is sick, one must be willing to be healed, whatever the consequences, John 5 teaches. Then Someone comes along who heals. He says: “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” Only faith was expected of the man. He believed the word that was spoken. Of us too it is expected that we believe His Word. When we know that it is God Himself who speaks, then there is no choice. Then we simply do what the Word says. Only that heals and gives life. Today it is not about literal healings. If you are lame and come to faith, you remain lame. Do not let that discourage you! The essence of our healing is precisely that it is not about improving the old man, but about exchanging the old man for a new man. By faith we have entered the hidden heavenly kingdom. We may now live in fellowship with our Physician. In His mercy He gives us all the things we need. Of us only this is expected: that we sin no more, that is, that we believe! We are to walk by faith. For the just shall live by faith (Hebrews 10:38). Take “thy bed” with thee. Where to is not said. Yet the man came into the temple. In the spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:18-22) or in the heavenly Jerusalem or in the heavenly promised land that we could not reach before, we

find the Lord. We reach it by doing what the Word commands us: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) and: “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).
Amen